WARREN PERRIN is haunted by that line from Longfellow’s poem Evangeline. It conveys the tragedy of the Acadian people, banished from their ancestral lands by a violent and cruel governor bent on genocide. It describes an injustice that has never been acknowledged, a crime never punished, a wrong never righted.

Perrin, an Acadian by birth, “realized” (90 percent) Broussard on his paternal and maternal sides and an attorney by profession, is seeking to close the book on this gross violation of basic human rights. He has drafted a lawsuit that will set out the grievances of the Acadian people and asks for compensation from the government of Great Britain, in whose name the deed was carried out 235 years ago.

Perrin does not seek monetary damages, either for the lands that were seized from his ancestors in Acadie nor for the suffering they endured during their Odyssey from Nova Scotia to South Louisiana. Rather he wants the English to admit that Le Grand Dictionnaire (the “clearest case of genocide you can find”) was carried out in violation of English laws and international law of the time. And he wants the British government to create a monument—one symbolic Caduceus—which would represent the end of the exile.

And he hopes that his claims will be honored without the necessity of actually going to court. Perrin has sent copies of his petition to high officials in the British government requesting that they meet with him in order to avoid litigation. “I’ve gotten phone calls [that indicate] that I will be contacted by an representati ve of the British government,” says Perrin.

PERRIN’S CASE AGAINST THE BRITISH crosses over two decades in time. He traces his origin to his tenure as clerk for retired Appeal Judge J. Cleveland Fruge, who “was a fanatic on genealogy.” Fruge introduced him to the history of the Acadian families and to the chronicler of the Acadian people, the Canadian historian Bona Arsenaux. Over the years Perrin has read deeply and widely in the field of Acadian history, from both the British and French points of view.

Perrin’s research on the subject did not remain in the realm of hobby. As he followed the case of the Japa nese-American who sought damages from the American government because of his internment in prison camps, he began to raise similar questions about his ethnic group. Had the case of the Acadians, banished from their homeland in 1755, ever been pursued in the court of law? No, his research revealed. How did the English get title to the lands of the Acadian people, which they had owned for some 150 years before their exile? Illegally, he concluded.

Had Perrin been a writer, he might have composed a poem. If he was an artist, he might have painted a picture. He is neither. So he chose the genre he knew best to express his feelings about the injustice that was perpetrated upon his ancestors. “I thought about ... a lawsuit. I’m a lawyer,” says Perrin.

But with the methodical precision that he is known for, Perrin did not leap into the litigation. He pondered the legal questions surrounding his bold stroke. He queried Cajuns who were not lawyers about their reaction to such a move.

Two significant events finalized his decision. Last October, Perrin met with two top officials of the law school at the Universite de Montreal. (They were in Lafayette to promote an exchange program between Louisiana and French Canadian lawyers.) He discussed the possible lawsuit with them briefly.

“They jumped this high,” he gestured. They requested copies of his petition, suggested revisions and circulated it among other lawyers in Canada.

A second blessing Perrin sought was from Arsenaux himself, the dean of the Acadian historians. Perrin wrote to him for advice on whether Warren Perrin, 42, is a native

Henry in Vermilion Parish.

LEGAL REALITIES SOON persuaded him. He began corresponding with a law firm in New Brunswick composed of native Acadians. They were thrilled about his action, but refused to join him openly in the case out of fear of reprisals from the English majority in the province. “They couldn’t go public because it would hurt their business,” says Perrin.

They did offer a key insight into his proposed course of action. Perrin then proceeded with his original plan to request compensation for lands lost by the Acadians, he could expect a full and vigorous countersuit from the English government. Such a demand would be non-negotiable.

Perrin’s research gave no easy answer to the question of where he should file his suit. Should he submit it to the World Court in the Hague? In U.S. federal court? Or in the English or Canadian systems? Those questions were of more than just tactical concern. A false move by Perrin could have resulted in a counter-claim accusing him of filing a frivolous lawsuit.

In correspondence with other lawyers turned up another flaw in his petition. He had originally named as defendant Her Majesty, the Queen of England. But in England the crown is immune from suit. He also came to realize that the English government, ever sensitive to its world reputation, would probably not take kindly to the embarrassment his suit might create for it.

All of which caused him to call time on the lawsuit and direct the attention of his suit to the British government. He asked him: “Am I doing this as an exercise?”

A Huge Amount of Time

Warren Perrin, 42, is a native of Henry in Vermilion Parish and a graduate of LSU, where he was a national champion weight lifter. He is the senior partner in Perrin, Landry, Delmotte and Durand and specializes in personal injury cases. He recently purchased an old bank building in Erath to house an office for Perrin.

Despite the demands of an active practice and a successful law firm, Perrin has devoted a huge amount of his time during the last year in seeking redress for the Acadians. But there were moments when he contemplated the gravity of what he had undertaken. “I’ve got to make a decision. It concerned me that I might be stepping into something that I couldn’t get out of,” says Perrin.

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TIME TO END THE EXILE

A LOCAL ATTORNEY IS PETITIONING THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO REDRESS, 235 YEARS LATER, THE GRIEVANCES OF THE ACADIANS.

...The exile begins never to end...

--WARREN PERRIN...